



**Prepared Statement of**  
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***"Revitalizing Communities: Are Faith-Based Organizations Getting the  
Federal Assistance They Need?"***

**Before the House Government Reform Committee  
Subcommittee on  
Federalism and the Census**

**US House of Representatives**

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Good Morning. I would like to thank Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Clay, and the Subcommittee on Federalism and the Census for the opportunity to speak with you today about faith-based organizations and community revitalization. This morning I welcome the opportunity to share with you the positive impact being made by faith-based organizations as well as the work of the Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GFBCI). I will offer testimony on 1) The establishment and purpose of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 2) Interaction between state and federal offices of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 3) Enablers and barriers to success for faith-based organizations and 4) Potential impact of HR 1054 for faith-based organizations (FBOs).

I would like to begin by telling you briefly about some of my experiences while working with the Faith-Based Initiative and the people that bring this initiative to life. Most of us are in public service because we want to make a difference in the lives of others. I have been working with the Faith-Based Initiative in Alabama for the last two years and never before in my career have I seen an initiative that has made such an impact on individuals and communities. I am amazed at the

willingness of faith and community based organizations to join together with one another as well as private and public sector agencies in order to combine their strengths to confront critical issues. Stated from a policy perspective, when properly implemented the Faith-Based Initiative brings together unique collaborative partners who design and deliver effective and efficient social service delivery systems. To say it more simply, when properly implemented the Faith-Based Initiative frees average people to join with other average people to do extraordinary things in their neighborhoods...extraordinary things that are so unique to their hometown that no government agency or political body could ever construct or mandate a solution so exquisitely tailored to heal individuals, families and communities.

As Governor Riley stated, "I see this as a bold new approach to government's role in helping those in need. To often the government has ignored or hindered the efforts of faith-based and community organizations through bureaucratic red tape and restrictions."

The people of Alabama have a lot of needs, but we are blessed because our state is rich in natural resources like compassion, decency, love and the desire to serve others. By partnering with the state and federal government, as well as the private sector, faith and community based organizations can greatly expand their ability to provide vital services like mentoring children of prisoners, working with the homeless and the hungry, helping ex-offenders re-enter society, substance abuse treatment, and transitioning people from welfare to work.

## **The Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives**

### **Background**

The Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was previously The Alabama Governor's Office on National & Community Service. The primary source of funding for the office was from The Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency that funds similar offices in approximately 46 states. CNCS refers to these offices as State Service Commissions. The majority of the federal funds received from CNCS are designed to promote an ethic of service and volunteerism within the State of Alabama and to administer the AmeriCorps program, a service program of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Alabama AmeriCorps members serve a vital role in meeting needs in communities across the state ranging from working with special needs populations, literacy training and disaster preparedness. In many cases these individuals would have no other provider of these services if not for AmeriCorps members.

In 2003 the White House issued a letter to every Governor encouraging them to establish an Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives. Governor Riley made the decision to combine the Faith and Community-Based office with the existing office on service and volunteerism. After all, who is more committed to service and volunteerism in communities than faith & community based organizations? As the CEO of the Corporation for National & Community Service David Eisner put it, "The programs of the Corporation act as a vital supply line to the armies of compassion." Combining these two offices maximized the resources & impact of both and is being used to leverage ways to meet the most critical community needs facing the State of Alabama.

By issuing Executive Order 21 (06-22-2004) which established the Alabama Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Governor Riley made Alabama the first state in the nation to create an office that combined the resources of the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS) with the Faith-Based Initiative. David Eisner has been extremely supportive of this model and praised Governor Riley's innovative approach during the press conference to announce the launch of the office.

### **Purpose**

The GFBCI works to 1.) increase an ethic of service and volunteerism in the State of Alabama, 2.) increase the capacity of faith & community based organizations within the state to better compete for funding opportunities and 3.) increase collaboration among the people and organizations that are trying to meet the greatest social service needs of our state.

The GFBCI was established to serve as a bridge between communities and government. We strive to partner Faith and Community Based Organizations, with private as well as public organizations in order to utilize all existing resources to address pressing social issues. We connect information seekers with educators and trainers while also connecting social service providers to potential local, state and federal partners. The office also partners with state & national providers, and nonprofit groups to provide high quality training and technical assistance such as capacity building, grant writing, fund raising and board development via workshops and seminars.

In addition to managing the Faith-Based Initiative and the AmeriCorps program, the GFBCI directs the Citizen Corps program. Citizen Corps is a grassroots Homeland Security initiative that provides training and volunteer opportunities for citizens. Individuals are taught how to prevent, prepare and respond to any natural disaster, terrorist act or emergency. Volunteers and faith and community based groups are often the first to respond and the last to leave in disaster response situations so it is a natural fit for the GFBCI to manage this program. In early 2004, only 14% of Alabamians were receiving the education and training

provided as part of Citizen Corps. Currently over 60% of our population is provided training by a local Citizen Corps Council and the numbers are steadily increasing. One of the primary contributors to our success is the strong partnership between the GFBCI, the Alabama Department of Homeland Security (ADHS) and the Alabama Emergency Management Agency (AEMA). Governor Riley along with Jim Walker, Director of the ADHS and Bruce Baughman, Director of the AEMA are committed to preparing Alabama's citizens and each understand the important role that volunteers and faith-based organizations play in preventing and responding to any disaster.

Three other important initiatives are managed in the GFBCI. The Alabama Women's Commission is a bipartisan group that serves to address pertinent issues facing the women of Alabama. The GFBCI is the lead agency in the state for the Alabama Statewide Interagency Council on Homelessness which is working to establish a strategic plan to end chronic homelessness in Alabama. The GFBCI has also convened a small advisory group comprised of faith-based substance abuse treatment providers with strong performance records who are currently working with our office and the Alabama Department of Mental Health to increase collaboration and partnership opportunities to more effectively address the issue of substance abuse treatment in our State.

The Governor's Office of FBCI is committed to taking deliberate steps to become more outcome driven in all aspects of the office. The GFBCI has partnered with an internationally recognized team of experts in corporate ROI (Return on Investment) evaluation. The ROI Institute™ has committed to work with us to develop a public sector model for outcome measures of our AmeriCorps and Citizen Corps Programs as well as the faith and community based programs. It is the objective of the ROI Institute and the GFBCI to not only give these organizations the capacity to serve society but also the capacity to measure success. The data collected from various surveys will serve to document the greatest areas of need in the state that could be better served by faith and community based organizations.

Youth at risk, homelessness, recidivism, and substance abuse are all significant issues that negatively impact our society. Alabama is number four within the US on measures of child well-being and in the top ten for number of children living in poverty.<sup>1</sup> Recent statistics compiled by the Alabama Department of Corrections show that Alabama has the highest ratio of inmates to officers than neighboring states and the smallest budget for Corrections. Additionally, Alabama has the lowest budget per inmate in the country. Alabama was ranked third highest in the nation students bearing firearms in school, an indicator for youth-at-risk.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alabama Kids Count, 2004; Alabama Vital Statistics, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Report on the Implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act in the States and Outlying Areas; School Year 2000-2001.

Substance abuse is prevalent and Alabama is listed among the few states where heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine use is steadily increasing.<sup>3</sup>

In order to correct issues of recidivism, substance abuse, child poverty, homelessness, and other like issues, Alabama relies on the assistance of faith-based organizations located within the communities. In order for these faith-based organizations to be more effective in meeting their objectives of serving the communities, they need to build capacity within their own organization through leadership development, organization development, program/services development, funding, and community engagement.

Governor Riley has been working with Bob Woodson of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise & David Caprara of CNCS to address the issues of rural poverty in Lowndes County, Alabama. As part of the Black Belt Region of our state, named for its rich dark soil, this is one of most impoverished and rural areas of Alabama. Through the collaborative efforts of this project 10 VISTA members are now working to assist with capacity building and addressing the needs of the most poor, funds have been granted from the Department of Labor, the Economic Development Administration and the Corporation for National & Community Service, and this project is now being considered as one of the top models in the nation for addressing rural poverty needs. This is featured on the NCNE website [www.ncne.com](http://www.ncne.com) under the heading Alabama Rural Initiative.

FBOs have limited funds by which to address these issues. Leadership development, organizational development, programs and services development and community engagement can assist FBOs in enhancing their productivity, the quality of the programs they administer, and reduce costs and efficiency.

Alabama will no longer be a state that ranks 47<sup>th</sup> on indicators of children's well being. By engaging grassroots organizations and providing them with the organizational skills necessary to build and sustain viable programs the face of Alabama's social service delivery system will be vastly improved.

## **Interaction Between State and Federal Offices of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives**

Alabama has had an extremely productive partnership with both the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and also with the Faith-Based liaisons within the Federal Agencies. The White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives provided much needed guidance and resources as Governor Riley established plans for the structure and purpose of Alabama's office. They continue to provide resources and pertinent information on the goals and progress of the initiative through conferences and personal contact. The

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<sup>3</sup> Crisis Counseling, 2004.

staff in the White House Office has not only been responsive to our requests but have always offered their guidance with the clear understanding that the Alabama Faith-Based Office should be designed to specifically address Alabama's needs.

Other agency Faith Centers have been invaluable to our work. David Caprara, Director of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives at the Corporation for National & Community Service and Frank Trinity, Legal Counsel at CNCS have worked extensively with our office to make certain that the Executive Order and the structure of the GFBCI is in full compliance with CNCS guidelines and regulations while allowing us to fully implement the Alabama Faith & Community Based Initiative. In addition to attending the press conference to announce the creation of the AL GFBCI, the CEO of CNCS, David Eisner has communicated his strong support of the structure of the GFBCI both in writing to the Governor as well as verbally to the Executive Committee members of the AL Commission.

One promising partnership between Alabama and the Department of Housing and Urban Development occurred during the 2004 Alabama Faith and Community-Based Development Conference where HUD was a major partner and participant. Cheryl Appline from HUD's Office of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives came to Alabama and spoke at the conference. Ryan Streeter has always provided helpful follow up information to many of the groups who contact us with questions following these types of conferences. The conference was a success because federal and state government partnered with financial institutions and for-profit and non-profit groups to provide training for Alabama's faith-based organizations who are striving to revitalize their communities. These community healers utilize HUD funding to strengthen their neighborhoods often one family or even one member at a time.

Strategies To Elevate People (STEP) is a faith-based organization currently utilizing HUD dollars to change lives in Alabama. Their Family Violence Prevention Program has been implemented for over four years at McKee Middle School in Montgomery, Alabama. Over 71% of the students from McKee Middle School receive free or reduced price lunches. Through STEP over 800 children receive anger management, conflict resolution, peer pressure resistance and empathy training during school and follow up home visits if needed. Although the curriculum is planned on an annual basis, the day to day implementation is flexible in order to address the daily needs of these students, many of whom live with frequent personal crisis and loss. Initial evaluations of the program have received very high marks from both students and educators. Results from an independent evaluation will be made available in August of 2005.

## Enablers and Barriers to Success for Faith-Based Organizations

Many of Alabama's faith-based organizations are striving to meet the critical social service needs of our most vulnerable populations. So many of the people involved in these organizations are motivated by a pure desire to help others in their moments of greatest need and often these groups are the most effective and efficient providers. In my experience the greatest enablers at the state level for faith-based organizations are financial and technical resources. Unfortunately the same is true in regard to barriers in that the lack of financial and technical resources is often the greatest barrier to a faith or community based organizations success.

Some of the greatest enablers to the initiative are the efforts of groups like We Care America who is providing training and very valuable resources to the heads of the various Offices of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives offices across the country. In addition the FASTEN network is working to recognize the work of FBO's & CBO's and the difference they are making in their communities. By allowing the message to get out about the good works that are happening across the nation through this initiative it is my hope that some of the fear of its critics will finally be assuaged.

Other barriers we have had to face and overcome are the lack of funding for state offices, and the lack of clear understanding from the state and even some federal agencies regarding the charitable choice laws and what this initiative is and what it is not, such as that it's not a new pot of money and it's not an affirmative action for faith-based organizations – helping both groups understand that the government can fund compassion but it cannot fund conversion is a big part of what we do.

Groups which serve the hurting through strong social service programs with the ability to access and properly administer federal, state and private funds have the power to tremendously impact individuals and communities. Making sure that FBO's and CBO's are trained properly to do just that is one of the greatest roles that Offices of Faith-Based & Community Initiatives on the state and federal level can play.

Although there has been improvement at the federal level, some barriers still exist. Many agencies have increased their outreach to faith and community-based organizations. The following examples demonstrate this point:

- HHS, HUD, Justice, Labor, and Education reported a 20% increase in FY04 from FY03 in the number of grants to faith-based organizations with 334 more grants awarded to faith-based organizations. (White House)
- The number of first-time faith-based grantees from HHS, HUD, Justice, Labor, and Education was 331 in FY 04 - representing a 20% increase from FY 03. (White House)

- CNCS awarded nearly 14 percent of agency funds to FBO's last year and has encouraged partnerships between State Service Commissions and faith-based groups to serve children of prisoners.
- AmeriCorps is encouraging states to conduct barrier assessments like the ones conducted at the federal level pursuant to President Bush's executive orders. CNCS is also providing technical assistance to State Service Commissions for this purpose.

## **Potential Impact of HR 1054 for Faith-Based Organizations**

The Faith-Based Initiative provides a sound framework for faith and community-based groups to leverage more resources for their vital programs but it is only a start. Much more needs to be done to educate both providers and recipients of options available to them. Legislation would be the most effective way to ensure that current progress is maintained and advanced.

Our office receives frequent calls from social service providers in need of guidance as they attempt to navigate the federal grant application and administration process. The Faith-Based liaisons within the federal agencies, as well as the state offices of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, are currently providing valuable and much needed training and technical assistance to these social service providers. As the initiative continues to grow the demand for this type of assistance has only increased and therefore I am strongly urging Congress to codify these offices and their roles to ensure that the quality of treatment and services continues to grow.

Government must continue to break down the barriers faced by these organizations. Not only because we should not discriminate based on religion but primarily because these caring groups are comprised of people with servant's hearts and may be our best and brightest hope to heal us from some of the most persistent and plaguing social problems we face.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for your time and attention. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today and share with you how the Faith-Based Initiative is making a difference in the lives of Alabamians. I cannot overstate my support of this initiative because I see on a daily basis how it draws diverse groups into incredibly innovative partnerships that can truly transform lives, communities and perhaps even a nation.

I am very blessed to have the opportunity to serve in my current position. There are so many bright moments I could relay to you but in closing I would like to share with you – and hopefully leave you with a mental image – of what it's like to



participate in the meetings of the Alabama Faith-Based Substance Abuse Task Force. As groups like these work together as a team they are becoming an agent for change in many positive ways within our State. State employees and others who seemed to have hardened themselves to thinking this was just the way things would always be and we would never be able to really change are beginning to have hope that we can work together to truly heal our state.

Usually the Faith-Based Substance Abuse Task Force group size is around 15 with 4 or 5 of the members representing state agencies. The others are men and women of average means who travel anywhere from 15 minutes to over three hours in order to attend. Each person is committed to restoring the lives of others who have fallen into the trap of substance abuse. Some of them have left highly successful careers in the private sector to pursue what they consider their calling. The motivation of these individuals is to truly change peoples lives and they are looking for ways to meet the enormous demands that exist in our state for these types of services without compromising what they believe is at the center of their programs...their faith. Their focus is never on growing larger and more successful but always on healing the people and families they treat.

Inevitably a new person will attend and become discouraged or even overwhelmed with the rules and regulations they face in trying to access federal or state funds. Every single time this happens one of the more seasoned members will take our newest addition aside and offer words of encouragement, their personal contact information and a commitment to mentorship. This is caring in its finest moment. The need to elevate ourselves and our organizations subjugated to the need to serve others. This is the mental image that I call up when I think of the potential of the Faith-Based Initiative.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today and share with you how the Faith-Based Initiative is making a difference in the lives of Alabamians. I cannot overstate my support of this initiative because I see on a daily basis how it draws diverse groups into incredibly innovative partnerships that can truly transform lives, communities and perhaps even a nation. I feel very blessed to have the opportunity to serve in my current position and now would be happy to answer any questions.